

THE GODS ARE NOT TO BLAME

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ROTIMI, O.

THE GODS ARE NOT
TO BLAME

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Ola Rotimi

THE GODS ARE NOT TO BLAME

Instytut Anglistyki



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GLASGOW NEW YORK TORONTO MELBOURNE WELLINGTON
CAPE TOWN IBADAN NAIROBI DAR ES SALAAM LUSAKA ADDIS ABABA
DELHI BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS KARACHI LAHORE DACCA
KUALA LUMPUR SINGAPORE HONG KONG TOKYO

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For my late mother
Oruene

CHARACTERS

NARRATOR

KING ADETUSA, old King of Kutuje

QUEEN OJUOLA, his wife

KING ODEWALE, successor to Adetusa

ABERO, Odewale's second wife

ADEROPO, son of Adetusa and Ojuola

OGUN PRIEST

BABA FAKUNLE, a soothsayer

BOY, his escort

FIRST CHIEF

SECOND CHIEF

THIRD CHIEF

ALAKA, Odewale's boyhood friend

GBONKA, OLOJO, messengers to Adetusa

IYA ABURO, a mad woman

ROYAL BARD

ADEWALE, ADEBISI, OYEYEMI, ADEYINKA, royal children

AKILAPA, BOKINI, LABATA, AGIDI, royal bodyguards

Townspeople, Drummers, Royal retainers

THE GODS ARE NOT TO BLAME was first produced by the Ori Olokun Acting Company, at the Ife Festival of the Arts, Nigeria, in 1968, with the following cast:

Narrator	-	-	-	-	-	Ola Rotimi
King Adetusa	-	-	-	-	-	Kayode Olajuyigbe
Queen Ojuola	-	-	-	-	-	Yinka Anjorin
King Odewale	-	-	-	-	-	Femi Robinson
Aderopo	-	-	-	-	-	Tony Obilade
Ogun Priest	-	-	-	-	-	Akin Sofoluwe
Baba Fakunle	-	-	-	-	-	Bode Sowande
Boy	-	-	-	-	-	Moji Anjorin
Chiefs	-	-	-	-	-	Biodun Banwo
						Gbemi Sodipo
						Soji Adegoke
Abero	-	-	-	-	-	Banke Akosile
Alaka	-	-	-	-	-	Olu Akomolafe
Gbonka	-	-	-	-	-	Johnson Olasusi
Iya Aburo	-	-	-	-	-	Femi Adebajo
Royal Bard	-	-	-	-	-	Peter Badejo
Bodyguards	-	-	-	-	-	Ola Awofade
						Rufus Orishayomi
						Olu Olajuyigbe

PROLOGUE

All actions in this prologue are in mime.

Background choral singing, drumming, and symbolic sound-effects come up now and again to stress climactic moments.

Blackout on stage. Rhythmic clinking of metallic objects can be heard in the background, building up, then fading to a sustained softness: the rhythm of Ogun, the Yoruba God of Iron and of War.

Moments later, spotlights brighten downstage, revealing the shrine of Ogun in its stark simplicity: two upright palm-tree fronds supporting, horizontally, a third; a lone matchet is stuck in the ground within this frame.

Presently, NARRATOR appears on stage, briefly regards the shrine from a distance, bows his head piously, then turns to address the audience.

NARRATOR. The struggles of man begin at birth.

It is meet then that our play begin with birth of a child.

The place is the land of Kutuje.

A baby has just been born

to King Adetusa and his wife Ojuola,

the King and Queen of this land of Kutuje.

[Merry singing and drumming. Enter QUEEN OJUOLA, bearing baby swaddled in white linen. She is accompanied by elderly women in a dance procession. Next, KING ADETUSA and his entourage of chiefs, prominent among them the tall, balding OGUN PRIEST.]

It is their first baby,
 so they bring him for blessing
 to the shrine of Ogun,
 the God of War, of Iron,
 and doctor of all male children.
 Then they call
 a Priest of Ifa,
 as is the custom,
 to divine
 the future that this boy
 has brought
 with him.

[Enter BABA FAKUNLE, a purblind old man, led by a small boy. BABA sits on the ground, and begins to cast his Opele, stringed objects of divination.]

NARRATOR. Baba Fakunle,
 oldest and most knowing
 of all Ifa priests in this world,
 it is you I greet.

Mother waits, Father waits.
 Now, tell them:
 what is it that the child has brought
 as duty to this earth
 from the gods?

[BABA FAKUNLE rises and moves aside. KING ADETUSA and QUEEN OJUOLA advance towards him, followed by the OGUN PRIEST, who carries the baby.]

Now Baba Fakunle
 tells Mother, tells Father,
 tells the Priest of Ogun and aged keeper
 of the King's household and the land;

He tells them
 what it is that the boy has brought
 as mission from the gods
 to carry out on earth.

BABA FAKUNLE. This boy, he will kill his own father
 and then marry his own mother!

[The TOWNSPEOPLE sing a dirge, softly.]

NARRATOR. Bad word!

Mother weeps, Father weeps.
 The future is not happy,
 but to resign oneself to it
 is to be crippled fast.
 Man must struggle.
 The bad future must not happen.
 The only way to stop it
 is to kill,
 kill the unlucky messenger
 of the gods,
 kill the boy.

Mother sinks to the ground,
 in sorrow for the seed
 that life must crush so soon!
 Father consoles her, in his own grief.

Priest of Ogun ties boy's feet
 with a string of cowries
 meaning sacrifice
 to the gods who have sent
 boy down to this Earth.

Priest bears boy to Gbonka,
 the King's special messenger,

and orders him to go
into the bush
with the little boy,
to the evil grove.

[GBONKA bears baby away. Lights fade on TOWNS-
PEOPLE sitting on bare stage.]

But Obatala,
God of Creation,
has a way
of consoling the distressed.

Two years later,
King Adetusa and his wife Ojuola
have another son,
Aderopo,
to fill the nothingness
left behind by the first.

[Lights on TOWNSPEOPLE again singing, dancing as they
disperse.]

It is now
two and thirty years
since that boy
was borne into the bush
to die, and dying stop
the awesome will of fate.

King Adetusa has met
rough death
and passed into the land
of our silent fathers.

[Enter QUEEN OJUOLA.]

Queen Ojuola herself
is not getting younger.
Their second son, Aderopo,
is now full-grown.

[ADEROPO appears, apparently returning from the farm,
with a hoe in one hand and a strung bundle of yams
slung over his shoulder. He prostrates himself before
OJUOLA, who takes the yams. They exit together.]

The land of Kutuje
had known peace and seen quiet
for some time
until
the people of Ikolu,
taking advantage of death in the palace,
attacked Kutuje.

[War song, IKOLU ATTACKERS invade palace;
KUTUJE TOWNSPEOPLE run helter-skelter.]

They killed hundreds,
they seized hundreds,
they enslaved hundreds more,
and left behind in the land of Kutuje
hunger, and thirst, and fear.

[KUTUJE TOWNSPEOPLE enter again and range
themselves solemnly about the stage.

Light fades on NARRATOR and shines simultaneously
on ODEWALE, clad in a shabby farmer's tunic and
tight-fitting shorts. He moves into the sorrowing crowd
of TOWNSPEOPLE, touching them consolingly as he
speaks.]

ODEWALE. I heard their wailings,
first as rumour;
I heard them, far, far away

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in the course of my countless wanderings
from land to land, town to town, village to village,
seeking peace and finding none.

I came to this land of Kutuje
to see for myself
the truth of the rumoured wailings.

Crossing seven waters
I, a son of the tribe of
Ijekun Yemoja,
found my way,
to this strange land
of Kutuje. I came
to see suffering,
and I felt suffering.
'Get up,
Get up,' I said
to them; 'not to do something
is to be crippled fast. Up, up,
all of you;
to lie down resigned to fate
is madness.
Up, up, struggle: the world is
struggle.'

[TOWNSPEOPLE rise up slowly in a solid phalanx,
their faces alight with a new self-confidence.]

I gathered the people of Kutuje
under my power
and under my power
we attacked the people of Ikolu,
freed our people,
seized the lands of Ikolu,
and prospered from their sweat.

PROLOGUE 7

So it is—
he who pelts another with pebbles
asks for rocks in return.
Ikolu is now no more,
but Kutuje prospered.
In their joy,
the people made me
KING,
me, of Ijekun tribe.
They broke tradition and made me,
unasked,
King of Kutuje.

[CHIEFS come forward and invest ODEWALE in royal
robes and crown while the TOWNSPEOPLE dance
round him, paying homage, then disperse.]

ROYAL BARD. There are kings and there are Kings:
King is greater than King.
It is not changing into the lion that is hard,
it is getting the tail of a lion.
Odewale, King, son
of Ogundele,
you will last long to rule us:
kolanut lasts long in the mouths
of them who value it!

[Heavy bata drumming bursts forth, and ROYAL BARD
dances off to the rhythm of kutelu.]

ODEWALE. For eleven years now,
I, Odewale,
the only son of Ogundele,
have ruled Kutuje
and have taken for wife,
as custom wishes,
Ojuola, the motherly Queen

of the former King
Adetusa.

She now is bearer
of all my four seeds:
Adewale, and Adebisi
his sister,
Oyeyemi, her brother,
and Adeyinka,
second sister.

[*CHILDREN run up to him, the GIRLS kneeling, the BOYS prostrating themselves.*]

We have all lived in joy
these eleven years
and Kutuje
has prospered.

But joy
has a slender body
that breaks too soon.

[*Tinkling rhythm of Ogun rises again in the background, quickly overtaken by dirge-chorus.*]

There is trouble
now in the land.
Joy has broken
and scattered.
Peace, too, is no more.

ACT ONE Scene 1

Before the palace. TOWNSPEOPLE—old, and young, men, women, some with babies strapped to their backs—all sprawling or crouching on the bare ground in varying forms of agonized semi-consciousness; moaning, keening. Voices become more inarticulate, more impatient; then give way to moaning and keening again.

ODEWALE appears, flanked by his chiefs. He stops on the topmost step, scanning TOWNSPEOPLE, who now raise the volume of their raucous lamentation.

FIRST CHIEF. Enough! People of our land! People of our
—the King stands before you in greeting.

FIRST CITIZEN. What use are greetings to a dying body?

CHIEFS [*shocked*]. Aha!

ODEWALE [*gestures to CHIEFS*]. Let them talk.

FIRST WOMAN. Yesterday, my twins died—both of them.

My third child . . . [*unstrapping the baby on her back*] here, feel her, feel how hot she is . . . come feel.

[*ODEWALE goes down and feels the child.*]

SECOND CITIZEN. When the head of a household dies, the house becomes an empty shell. But we have you as our head, and with you, our Chiefs; yet we do not know whether to thank the gods that you are with us, or to look elsewhere for hope.

THIRD CITIZEN. When the chameleon brings forth a child, is not that child expected to dance? As we have made you King, act as King.

FIRST CHIEF. Do you think we have no thoughts in our mind for your good?

SECOND WOMAN. Sickness has been killing us all these many

days. What has the King done about it?

THIRD WOMAN. You overwhelmed the bushmen of Ikolu when they attacked and enslaved our land. Now we cry in pain for help, and there is silence.

SECOND CITIZEN. When rain falls on the leopard, does it wash off its spots? Has the richness of kingly life washed off the love of our King for his people?

FOURTH CITIZEN. We have suffered long in silence!

FIFTH CITIZEN. How long must feverish birds tremble in silence before their keeper?

ALL. H-e-l-p us ... h-e-l-p us ... !

ODEWALE. My people!

[*Voices still indignantly beseeching.*]

OGUN PRIEST. Ha! Enough, ha-ha! [*Noise subsides.*] The King speaks. You have had your say now, pray, let the King speak. Ha!

[*Complete silence.*]

ODEWALE. My people. Children of our fathers. Sickness is like rain. Does the rain fall on one roof alone? No. Does it fall on one body and not on another? No. Whoever the rain sees, on him it rains. Does it not? It is the same with sickness. You do me great wrong, therefore, to think that, like a rock in the middle of a lake, forever cooled by flowing waters, I do not know, and cannot know the sun's hotness that burns and dries up the open land. Indeed, you do me great wrong, my people ...

CITIZENS [*prostrating themselves*]. We beg for forgiveness.

ODEWALE. No, no—do not beg. I have said nothing yet to prove me innocent of your charges, and already you beg for forgiveness. No,*do not beg, I pray you, only listen. And listen well. I know your pains, my people. I feel your suffering too. Sickness is in your houses? Sickness has entered my palace too. [*Calling.*] Ojuola! Ojuola!

[*Addressing TOWNSPEOPLE.*] My children too are ...

[*OJUOLA appears.*]

OJUOLA. My lord ...

ODEWALE. Bring the children here.

OJUOLA. Adebisi is just trying to sleep after being sick, my lord.

ODEWALE. Wake her up, bring her—bring them, bring them all.

OJUOLA. Very well my lord. [*Exit into rear rooms.*]

ODEWALE. Now to answer your question. What have I been doing about the sickness in the land? Have I been sleeping? If so, I am sick in the head: for only a madman would go to sleep with his roof on fire.

[*Enter OJUOLA with children; ABERO carrying one of them.*]

Ah, yes. Now, my people, look at them— [*Lifts up one of the children.*] See ... see the mucus on his nose? You feel him ... go on, touch. [*Points to another child leaning against her mother.*] That one cannot even stand up. Look at her stomach. She has not tasted food in three days. Hunger fills her stomach; sickness will not allow even the smallest morsel to enter. Anything she puts in her mouth—erhhh!

TOWNSPEOPLE [*moved*]. Oh, pity—

ODEWALE. Pity yourselves. Let everybody pity his own self.

[*To OJUOLA and ABERO.*] Take them inside.

[*OJUOLA and ABERO lead children away.*]

FIRST CITIZEN. Let us sacrifice rams to the gods.

ODEWALE. Sacrifice, did you say? To what gods have we not made sacrifice, my chiefs and I? Soponna, the god of the poxes? Ela, the god of Deliverance? What god? Sango, the god of thunder and rainfall, whose showers can help wash away the evil in the soil on which we stand? What god have we not called upon to help us?

SECOND CHIEF. We have also sent for Baba Fakunle, the greatest of all medicinemen in this world. He will be here soon.

FIRST CHIEF. Which of you knows where Aderopo is now?

THIRD CITIZEN. Has the sickness killed him?

[TOWNSPEOPLE wail a dirge.]

ODEWALE. Peace, people, peace. All we ask you is: where is Aderopo? We did not say cry for him, the poor man is not dead yet.

TOWNSPEOPLE. Where is he then?

ODEWALE [To OGUN PRIEST]. Elder One, you tell them.

PRIEST. We have sent Aderopo to Ile-Ife, the land of

Orunmila, to ask the all-seeing god why we are in pain.

ODEWALE [To TOWNSPEOPLE]. Now you know. Those of you who thought that we, my chiefs and I, slept while you suffered, what have you now to say?

TOWNSPEOPLE. We thank our king for—

ODEWALE. No, no, do not thank me. I am only doing my duty. Do not thank me. Instead, let me ask you one question. Now, you have all come here, sprawling, vomiting, rubbing tears on one another, begging me to do my duty, and help you. But what about you yourselves? What have you done to help yourselves? Answer. Or is the land at peace? Are not people ailing and dying?

TOWNSPEOPLE. We are suffering my Lord, we are—

ODEWALE. Yes I know. But what have you done about it, I ask. You there—Mama Ibeji—what did you do to save your twins from dying? It is sickness that man can cure, not death. What did you do to cure their sickness? Nothing? Oh, I see, your body is too weak, your bones suddenly gone soft, you cannot move, you cannot go into the bush and cut herbs to boil for your children to drink. Is that so? Answer. 'The land is bad', you all

cry, 'we suffer much, we die', you moan. Yet each one of you lies down in his own small hut and does nothing. Now tired of doing nothing, you have all come like lobsters, carrying your large heads of complaints to my door-step. Well, let me tell you, brothers and sisters, the ruin of a land and its peoples begins in their homes. If you, in your own small huts are so helpless, so crippled that you now come to me, a single man, expecting magic, then, let me tell you that we shall soon all die, hand in hand, in one big grave; hand in hand, I say, smiling at each other's eyeballs, and smelling the rot of our gross, corrupt bodies.

If you need help, search for it first among yourselves. Do not open your noses at me, I cannot help. Why? Because I, Odewale, son of Ogundele, I am only a person, human: like you, and you, and . . . you.

SECOND WOMAN. Your highness . . . I have tried, in my own house, I have tried . . . I boiled some herbs, drank them, yet sickness remains.

ODEWALE. What herbs did you boil?

SECOND WOMAN. *Asufe eiyeye* leaves—

ODEWALE. Y-e-s.

SECOND WOMAN. Lemon-grass, teabush, and some limeskins.

ODEWALE. That's good. And nothing happened?

SECOND WOMAN. I and my household drank the medicine, yet we do not get better, my lord.

ODEWALE. For how long did you boil it?

SECOND WOMAN. As soon as it boiled, I put it down.

ODEWALE. No, no. You must boil it longer, woman, longer, so that the medicines in the herbs can come out in full spirit to fight the sickness. Boil it longer.

THIRD WOMAN. I boiled mine longer—a long time. I even added *dogo-yaro* leaves to it.

ODEWALE. And how does the body feel?

THIRD WOMAN. Not as well as the heart wishes, my lord.

ODEWALE. Our talk is of illness, sister. To get fully cured one needs patience. The moon moves slowly but by daybreak it crosses the sky. Keep on drinking the medicine; one day you will see change. Patience.

FIRST CITIZEN. I don't even know what those herbs are.

ODEWALE. Ask your neighbour.

FOURTH WOMAN. My trouble is that I drink medicine from herbs, my husband drinks it too. But the children ... I don't know how to give it to them so that they can drink it all.

ODEWALE. By trying often, the monkey learns to jump from tree to tree without falling. Keep on trying.

Now, everybody go home ... try. Get together, form groups of threes—Ajanu—

AJANU. My lord.

ODEWALE. Who is your neighbour?

AJANU. My neighbour? Aiyilara, the palmwine tapper, my lord.

ODEWALE. Who else?

AJANU. The house on the left of mine belongs to Ogini, the fisherman.

ODEWALE. Very well, the three of you—

BODYGUARD. My lord, Aderopo has come back from Ile-Ife.

[TOWNSPEOPLE cheer.]

ODEWALE. Let us not be happy yet, we haven't heard what task the gods expect of us.

TOWNSPEOPLE. It will be good.

The task will be easy.

ODEWALE. So may it be. [*Roughly.*] Up, all of you—into the bush! Go and get cutlasses—go on! Go and pick herbs from the bush, boil them, drink them. Get up, go on—in twos, threes, get up!

WOMAN. Women too?

ODEWALE. Women stay at home and look after the children,

make the fire, get boiling pots ready. Men, you all go! [*Calling.*] Abero! Ab—

ABERO. Here I am, my lord.

ODEWALE. Bring me those herbs I cut from the bush last night. Everybody, come and see ... I, with my own two hands, and alone in the bush ... [*Taking the leaves from Abero who has just entered with them.*] These ... see? My wife, Ojuola herself has boiled part of them for the household. This evening again, I head for the bush for more.

TOWNSPEOPLE [*inspired, beginning to disperse*]. We shall go!

Long may your highness live!

We thank you, our lord!

May your reign be blessed!

Long may the crown rest on your head!

And the royal shoes on your feet!

ODEWALE. That's the spirit, my people, go about it with gladness! Life is a struggle.

[*To CHIEFS and OJUOLA*] Come, people, let us—

[*Turning towards the palace he notices a woman, IYA ABURO, on the ground, fumbling with her baby, undecided whether to saddle it on her back, or simply drop it. Somehow, she manages to strap the baby to her side, and starts crossing the stage, singing a lullaby.*]

Sister, I hope it is nothing.

IYA ABURO [*kneeling deferentially*]. He will come, your highness. I ... I told him, the gods bear me witness ...

[*Tearfully.*] I told him and he said he was ... coming too.

FIRST CHIEF [*whispering to ODEWALE*]. It was her husband killed by the sickness two days ago, my lord.

IYA ABURO. I thank you, your highness ... He said so, I swear ... [*Laughs loudly.*] He was coming, he was coming, then he went and got all dressed up, and

went directly to the farm, not looking right, not looking left!

[*She releases baby from her side, carries it upside down, and begins to back away, resuming her lullaby.*]

ODEWALE [*to a BODYGUARD*]. Labata! Take that baby from her.

IYA ABURO [*addressing LABATA as he approaches her*]. You come too late, my husband. We have ... oh, pity ... we have just finished eating yams in the King's small bathroom ... small-small bathroom ... [*Sniggers coyly.*] Oh, you want the child? [*She readily lets LABATA take it.*] I beg of you, carry her well, do not hurt her fingers ... she must live ... to eat yams in small-small bathrooms ... [*Backs out of sight.*]

ODEWALE. Ojuola, from this day on you care for the baby.

OJUOLA. I will, my lord ... [*Takes baby from LABATA, and enters palace.*]

ODEWALE. Bokini!

BOKINI. My lord.

ODEWALE. Quickly take that woman to the home of Alaba the curer of sick-heads. Whatever he charges for the cure of her head, tell Alaba that I shall pay.

BOKINI [*excited*]. I go my lord.

ODEWALE. And—

BOKINI. My lord?

ODEWALE. Do not rush her. Hear me? Gently ... gently.

[*BOKINI prostrates himself and hurries after IYA ABURO.*]

ODEWALE [*entering palace, to CHIEFS*]. Come brothers, let us hear the word that my wife's son has brought from the oracle.

[*As the lights fade on them, we hear a sound like the striking of a gong. Presently, the TOWNCRIER appears,*

his face tattooed with chalk, bare to the waist. He stands, stage-centre, strikes gong for attention, and intones.]

TOWNCRIER.

O ya

È jẹ k'alo

È m'ada l'owo, e gbe

koko

Igbo ya, igbo ya.

Ewe gbogbo l'ogun

Ogun gbogbo l'ewe

O ya

È jẹ k'alo

È m'ada l'owo, e gbe

koko

Igbo ya, igbo ya.

At'onile, at'alejo

At'omode o, at'agba

Igbo ya, igbo ya.

Come round everybody

Let us all go, into the bush

Get your cutlasses

get cooking pots

get ready for work.

All herbs are medicines

all medicines herbs

so, come round everybody

let us all go

into the bush.

Landlord get up,

Guests, join in too.

Everyone, young and old

into the bush.

[*TOWNSWOMEN appear, carrying earthen pots on their heads. They pick up the TOWNCRIER's tune, and dance, heading for the bush.*

The women haven't completely danced past when a contrasting chorus of male voices approaches from another direction. The men, all skimpily clad in bante—undershorts—appear wielding cutlasses. Drumbeats accentuate their dance song.]

TOWNSMEN.

T'eba ngbo gbe-gbe-gbe

T'eba ngbo gbe-gbe-gbe

B'osi gbe

When you hear our voices

Brother, you better respond

to the call of duty

Ẹhinkule rẹ
L'ao gbe si
T'ẹba ngbọ gbe-gbe-gbe

or you'll have yourself to
blame.

Awa l'omọ ale'ku wonu
ogan

Awa l'omọ aja'we sọ l'okọ
Iku ogbe b'oduro

Arun o se ra rẹ

We'll chase death back
into its hole—

We, masters of herbs.

Sickness we dare you to wait

and you, too, death.

[ODEWALE and CHIEFS come out and happily join in
the dance.]

ODEWALE. That's the spirit, my people.

[The men pay homage with the dance and hurry off
into the bush. Lights fade.]

ACT ONE Scene 2

ODEWALE and CHIEFS all seated in council.

Enter ADEROPPO. Prostrates himself.

ADEROPPO. Your highness ...

KING'S BODYGUARD. The King greets you.

ADEROPPO [To CHIEFS]. Fathers of our land—

ODEWALE. Aderopo, lover of our kingdom, your reign will
be happy.

PRIEST. We greet you, son, you have come well.

ADEROPPO [rising]. I thank you all, my fathers.

ODEWALE. The news from Orunmila, is it good or bad?

[ADEROPPO is silent.] The news from Ile-Ife, son.

ADEROPPO. It is good, your highness.

PRIEST. The gods be praised.

ADEROPPO. The oracle of Ifa at the shrine of Orunmila has
found the cause of the sickness and deaths now in our
midst, and it has told me what the people can do
so that there may be peace of mind again in every home.

PRIEST. Thus far, your words sound like fresh wine, son—
full of sweetness but lacking substance.

ODEWALE. Details, son, give us the details.

ADEROPPO. I'd rather tell you those in private, my lord.

ODEWALE. Private! What is private about a whole
kingdom in pain?

FIRST CHIEF. Speak openly, son.

ADEROPPO. It is said that the secrets of a home should be
known first to the head of the home. [Goes to
ODEWALE to whisper in his ear.]

ODEWALE [shoving him off]. I refuse to listen alone. Speak
openly, son, before all—a cooking-pot for the
chameleon is a cooking-pot for the lizard!

PRIEST. Speak up, son.

ODEWALE. Give us the details.

ADEROPPO. Very well, then. The oracle at the shrine of
Orunmila sends you all greetings.

FIRST CHIEF [caustically]. We sent you all the way to Ile-Ife
to bring us greetings from Ifa. All right, we greet Ifa too.
Thank you.

ODEWALE. Do not cut in, I pray you.

ADEROPPO. The oracle said that there is a curse in this land,
and until that curse is purged, our suffering will go on.

FIRST CHIEF. And what is so private about that—

ODEWALE. No arguing, I pray. This curse—is it in the
body of a man, in the womb of a woman, in the
head of some animal, in the air—where?

PRIEST. He is asleep again.

ODEWALE [calling]. Ojuola! Ojuo—

OJUOLA [entering]. My lord— [Kneels.]

ODEWALE [raising her up]. Forget courtesies, woman. Go

and cure your son, he has been stricken with dumbness in Ile-Ife.

ADEROPO. I was not—

FIRST CHIEF [*fuming*]. Then speak!

SECOND CHIEF. Do not force me to call you fearful names!

OJUOLA. What did the oracle say?

THIRD CHIEF. He has spoken.

ODEWALE. What?

THIRD CHIEF. Ifa sends us greetings. [*Chuckles*.]

ODEWALE. My people, I beg of you, plead with him, or I shall lose my temper soon!

[*Other CHIEFS begin to grumble.*]

OJUOLA. Pray, son, tell us the word from Ifa. No matter how bad it is, we are ready to hear it. The horns cannot be too heavy for the head of the cow that must bear them. To remain silent is to make light of the troubles in the land.

ADEROPO. I am not making light of them, Mother. It is that the word is hard that must be said.

OJUOLA. Say it and you shall have done your part.

ADEROPO. Very well. Ifa oracle says the curse, your highness, is on a man.

SECOND CHIEF. A man!

ADEROPO. A full-grown man.

ODEWALE. And who is this man?

ADEROPO. I don't know, your highness, the oracle did not say.

ODEWALE. Very well. This man—the cursed one—what did he do, what offence?

ADEROPO. The man has killed another man.

CHIEFS. Killed another man?

ODEWALE. And who was this man?

ADEROPO. The oracle said—

FIRST CHIEF [*hotly*]. Don't you dare give us an 'I don't know' answer again young man, because Ifa oracle is not as

dumb as you've been trying to make it. Hear me?

If you want to be deaf and dumb, be deaf and dumb.

ODEWALE. Let's be calm, brothers. [*To ADEROPO.*] Who was this man who got killed by this . . . this cursed villain? Answer quick.

ADEROPO. King Adetusa—my own father, the King who ruled this land before you.

ODEWALE and CHIEFS. King Adetusa!

ADEROPO. Yes, your highness. He was slain in violence, and it is fearful to know that that same murderer still lives in peace in this same land. The oracle warns us that we have left our pot unwatched, and our food now burns.

CHIEFS. A killer in our midst?

OJUOLA. Who are we to trust, then?

ADEROPO. That was why I feared to speak, Mother. Until the rotten tooth is pulled out, the mouth must chew with caution.

PRIEST. Whoever he is, he shall pay for his act—life for life; death, hot death awaits him—

ODEWALE. No, no—that is no punishment for the killer of a King and bringer of so much suffering to our people.

ADEROPO. What will you do to him then?

ODEWALE. Slowly. We will kill him slowly, so that he spends the rest of his living days dying with each moment that passes. [*To a BODYGUARD.*] Agidi! Go summon the Townspeople here. It is time for action.

[*Exit AGIDI hurriedly, striking a gong to summon the TOWNSPEOPLE.*]

PRIEST. Ifa did not mention the name of this murderer?

ADEROPO. No, he gave no name.

FIRST CHIEF. A riddle.

ODEWALE. That's nothing. I'm good at loosening riddles.

ADEROPO. My lord, may I go now to bring Baba Fakunle from Oyo?

FIRST CHIEF. Go quickly, hurry him down here yourself.

[Exit ADEROPO.]

ODEWALE. Now my people—when trees fall on trees, first the topmost must be removed. First, tell me—when was King Adetusa slain?

[CHIEFS think.]

Ojuola—

OJUOLA. A long time ago my lord.

ODEWALE. Where?

OJUOLA. On the road from Oshogbo.

SECOND CHIEF. He said he was going to see his mother's land near Èdẹ.

ODEWALE. Well, wasn't there anyone with him? Someone who survived? Someone who managed to come home and say what exactly happened, where it happened, how it happened, not even a rat?

PRIEST. Five bodyguards were in his company, but only one of them came back.

ODEWALE. What happened to the other four?

SECOND CHIEF. They ran away after the killing your highness.

ODEWALE. Why?

FIRST CHIEF. Out of fear that our people would kill them in anger, I think.

ODEWALE. I see . . . what about the loyal bodyguard who came back? What did he say?

THIRD CHIEF. Robbers.

PRIEST. But even with him, there was confusion in his head.

FIRST CHIEF. He said robbers lay in wait for them in the bush near Èdẹ and killed the King.

[Enter TOWNSPEOPLE.]

TOWNSPEOPLE. We hear that your highness wants us.

ODEWALE. Hmm. My people, I fear and I tremble. Suspensions, heavy suspicions fill my heart. I look about me . . . eyes, white, vacant, innocent, they stare back from faces of sorrow and pain. But the faces may as well be smiling. For who knows what is behind those eyes: white eyes, vacant eyes, innocent eyes? When the frog in front falls in a pit, others behind take caution. It would be *me* next. Me an Ijekun man, a stranger in the midst of your tribe. [Stares at CHIEFS.] When crocodiles eat their own eggs, what will they not do to the flesh of a frog?

FIRST CHIEF. These are heavy words, your highness.

THIRD CHIEF. Your charge is too wide, my lord. Let your highness name one, point to one person among us who is plotting evil against the throne.

ODEWALE. I should name one?

FIRST CHIEF. You have been King now eleven years; name one among us who in words or action is seeking your downfall.

ODEWALE. I cannot name names.

CHIEFS. Why not?

ODEWALE. All lizards lie prostrate: how can a man tell which lizard suffers from bellyache? In time, the pain will make one of them lie flat on its back, then shall that which has been unknown be made known. [Crosses to TOWNSPEOPLE.] Minds are not clean, my people. Evil doers are many in this very land; evil doers backed by heavy money, heavy influence. The manner of your former King's death is all too clear to me now. Bribery. Men with money bribed villains to kill King Adetusa. With their influence, they dug his grave and in it buried his body and his memory. Then with money and influence they sheltered

the murderers. Now Ifa says we suffer for their act.
[Crosses to Ogun shrine.]

TOWNSPEOPLE [*variously*].

The world is bad.

One does not know whom to trust.

The good ruler who stands for the people becomes a victim too soon.

And bad rulers like bad sauce, stay longer!

A world that knows not what it wants.

A dizzy world, this.

[ODEWALE pulls out matchet from the shrine, raises it and swears.]

ODEWALE. Before Ogun the God of Iron, I stand on oath.

Witness now all you present that before the feast of Ogun, which starts at sunrise, I, Odewale, the son of Ogundele, shall search and fully lay open before your very eyes the murderer of King Adetusa. And having seized that murderer, I swear by this sacred arm of Ogun, that I shall straightway bring him to the agony of slow death. First he shall be exposed to the eyes of the world and put to shame—the beginning of living death. Next, he shall be put into lasting darkness, his eyes tortured in their living sockets until their blood and rheum swell forth to fill the hollow of crushed eyeballs. And then, the final agony: we shall cut him from his roots. Expelled from this land of his birth, he shall roam in darkness in the land of nowhere, and there die unmourned by men who know him, and buried by vultures who know him not.

[*Solemnly*.] May the gods of our fathers—Obatala, Orunmila, Sango, Sopponna, Esu-Elegbara, Agemo, Ogun—stand by me.

[CURTAIN.]

ACT TWO Scene 1

Same place. Next day.

The CHIEFS are sitting, commenting on the allegations made by the King the day before. This is to be improvised in tones suggestive of resentment, disgust, and mortified resignation—but in hushed tones.

Side door opens, CHIEFS start, thinking it is ODEWALE. But ADEROPPO enters.

ADEROPPO [*prostrating himself*]. I greet the elders of our land.

CHIEFS. You have come well, son.

Your life will be good.

ADEROPPO. I have brought Baba Fakunle. [*Ushers him in.*]
Baba ...

[*Enter BABA FAKUNLE, stooping with age and purblind, led by a small boy. CHIEFS squat in greeting, but BABA FAKUNLE remains crouched over his stick, unmoved by the courtesies shown to him.*

Enter ODEWALE. ADEROPPO prostrates himself and exits.

ODEWALE. Baba Fakunle—

BODYGUARD. Baba, the King greets you.

ODEWALE.

Baba Fakunle,
oldest and most honoured
of all Seers
in this world.

Baba Fakunle,
blind but all knowing:
head downwards

like a bat, and like a bat
 fully aware of the way
 the birds fly;
 Baba Fakunle,
 even without eyes
 you are all-seeing—
 a partridge: you see with the face
 you see with the whole body.

A chicken eats corn, drinks water
 swallows pebbles,
 yet she complains of having no teeth.
 If she had teeth, would she eat gold?
 Let her ask the cow who has teeth
 yet eats grass.

Baba Fakunle
 if you had eyes what would you see?
 Ask us who have eyes yet see
 nothing.

FIRST CHIEF. Aged keeper of all secrets
 known only to the god
 who is your master,
 you the watchman
 Baba Fakunle,
 it is you we greet.

ODEWALE. There is plague in this land, and Orunmila tells
 us from Ile-Ife that the cause of this suffering is the
 presence of a murderer, one who murdered King
 Adetusa, the King before I became King of this land
 of Kutuje. Pray, tell, who is this murderer?

SECOND CHIEF. We beg of you, Old One, help us with
 your strange powers.

ODEWALE. Baba Fakunle, you have come well.

BABA FAKUNLE. Don't come near me! I smelled it. I

smelled the truth as I came to this land. The truth
 smelled stronger and still stronger as I came into this
 place. Now it is choking me ... choking me, I say.
 Boy! Lead on home away from here.

SECOND CHIEF. For the love of the gods, do not turn away.

FIRST CHIEF. You offend the gods who gave you powers
 to help us, Old One. We are blind.

BABA FAKUNLE. Pray, let me depart from here in peace.

ODEWALE [*to a BODYGUARD*]. Block that door!

[*BABA FAKUNLE tries to move on but is rudely barred
 by BODYGUARDS who disengage boy's hand from his, and
 hustle him back towards ODEWALE.*]

BABA FAKUNLE. Handle me gently, I pray you, for I
 am full of years.

FIRST CHIEF. Well then, talk!

ODEWALE. I shall count to three ... Baba, feel this ... [*Lets
 him feel his sword.*] I have sworn by Ogun to expose
 the murderer before the eyes of all at the feast of
 Ogun that ends tonight. I brought you all the way
 from Oyo to help us; and you are headstrong.

My people ail and die; you are headstrong and silent.

BABA FAKUNLE. Rage all you can, King, I will speak no more.

THIRD CHIEF. Pray you, Old One, to be silent is to be—

ODEWALE. Don't beg him. He will not talk. The murderers
 have sealed his lips with money. Hmm, our race is
 falling fast, my people. When the elders we esteem so
 highly can sell their honour for devil's money, then
 let pigs eat shame and men eat dung.

BABA FAKUNLE. You called me pig! *You* are the murderer!

FIRST CHIEF. Murderer?

ODEWALE. Why, I have not killed you yet; I have not
 even touched you and you call me—

BABA FAKUNLE. Go on, touch me. Call up your raw anger,

and in the blindness of it, strike me dead!

FIRST CHIEF. Your highness, the man doesn't know what he is saying.

THIRD CHIEF. It is old age.

BABA FAKUNLE [*feeling for BOY*]. Boy ... boy ... where are—

[*BODYGUARDS rush on him, to force him down.*]

ODEWALE. Gently!

BABA FAKUNLE. No, let them ... let them attack me. Is it not ignorance that makes the rat attack the cat? Ten thousand of them—let them ... attack me. They have the arms, they have the swords. But me ... I have only one weapon and this I have used, and mine is the victory. Ifa be praised.

SECOND CHIEF. What weapon is it you have used?

BABA FAKUNLE. Truth. The weapon of Truth.

ODEWALE [*scornfully*]. What truth?

BABA FAKUNLE. The truth that you are the cursed murderer that you seek.

ODEWALE. Do you feel better now?

THIRD CHIEF. Is it because the King called you plotter in the death of our former King, that now, like a parrot that has eaten too much pepper, you call him murderer?

SECOND CHIEF. My lord, let him go: Our Elders say he who drums for a sick man is himself a sick man.

ODEWALE [*to BABA*]. Have you anything more to say? Very well then, Old One ... here ... [*Handing BOY money.*] have this for your troubles.

BABA FAKUNLE. How much did he give you boy?

BOY. Ten cowries, Baba.

BABA FAKUNLE. Hand him back nine. All I am taking is one cownry for Esu the messenger of Ifa and Olodumare. No more.

ODEWALE. I don't want the balance.

BABA FAKUNLE. Then hand him back his money, boy.

ODEWALE. Give it back then. You do not deserve it anyway.

Now go and eat without shame the dirty money of your masters, the murderers.

BABA FAKUNLE. Again you force words from me! [*Hotly.*]

You force words from me again you ... you bedsharer!

ODEWALE. What was that?

BABA FAKUNLE. I said you ... bedsharer!

CHIEFS [*restraining ODEWALE*]. My lord—

Your highness, peace—

Will you listen to this?

Patience, my lord—

ODEWALE. Does he think because he is old and blind he can use words freely on me?

BABA FAKUNLE. Your hot temper, like a disease from birth, is the curse that has brought you trouble.

ODEWALE. Listen to that!

FIRST CHIEF. Take him in ... [*To BODYGUARDS.*] Chase that man away, or are you sick in the head?

[*BODYGUARDS begin to push BABA FAKUNLE off.*]

CHIEFS lead ODEWALE into inner room out of sight.]

BABA FAKUNLE [*yelling*]. King Odewale, King of Kutuje, go sit down in private and think deep before darkness covers you up ... think ... think ... think!

[*Enter OJUOLA, agitated.*]

OJUOLA [*seeing FIRST CHIEF alone*]. Balogun, what is the matter?

FIRST CHIEF. Haste to your husband, woman.

[*Exit OJUOLA into inner room just as other CHIEFS come out.*]

SECOND CHIEF. He needs rest.

THIRD CHIEF. The Seer is sick in the head!

FIRST CHIEF. It is old age: that is why I fear to think of ageing.

SECOND CHIEF. I feel no pity for him.

THIRD CHIEF. For whom?

SECOND CHIEF [*indicating ODEWALE within*]. The way he too accused us yesterday in the eyes of the whole world.

FIRST CHIEF. Enough. Everyone to his home.

[*They take their leave, embracing one another. OJUOLA hurries in.*]

FIRST CHIEF. I hope there is nothing wrong.

OJUOLA. The King says I should send for Aderopo. [*Exit.*]

ACT TWO Scene 2

ODEWALE comes out of bedroom. He is visibly shaken.

ODEWALE. When the evil-plotter beats his drum for the downfall of the innocent, the gods will not let that drum sound!

FIRST CHIEF. Your highness, you must rest awhile.

ODEWALE [*pacing nervously*]. Indeed! When the evil-plotter beats his drum for the downfall of the innocent, I say, Oduduwa, the all-powerful will never, never let it—[*Faces FIRST CHIEF.*] It is all my fault. I should have known. The hyena flirts with the hen, the hen is happy, not knowing that her death has come. I am an Ijekun man. That is the trouble. I, an Ijekun man, came to your tribe, you made me king, and I was happy, ignorant that plots, subversion, and intrigues would forever keep me company. Oh, but you wait . . . you will know me. One by one I will catch

you: one by one, I will fell you all. First, that boy, Aderopo or whatever he calls himself. He wants to be King, so what did he do? He bribed the Seer to come and insult me, to call me murderer of his father.

FIRST CHIEF. My lord, you make charges sometimes without grounds.

ODEWALE. I do, do I? Very well then, tell me this:

'Bedsharer'. You heard it. Didn't you? That blind bat who calls himself Seer says I am a 'bedsharer'. What does that mean? Sharing a bed with whom? Ojuola, Aderopo's mother. In other words, I don't belong in that bed. In other words, I have no right to be King. What do you think of that? You don't answer?

FIRST CHIEF. The Seer is too old, my lord, he doesn't know what he's saying.

ODEWALE. Indeed? Tell me more. Go on, son of Kutuje. Expose yourself. The Seer is too old? Too old to talk sense? Then why, may I ask, did you readily agree when Aderopo advised us to bring him here to talk?

FIRST CHIEF. We thought he could help.

ODEWALE. Well, he has done what you sons of Kutuje wished. He called me murderer. Which means I must leave the land. Is that not so? [*Chuckles cynically.*] Is Aderopo jealous that I am sharing a bed with his mother? Very well then, let him come and sleep with his mother.

FIRST CHIEF. The gods forbid that such thoughts should enter the heads of the living.

ODEWALE. Oh, you wait, I have sent for him to come. Bedsharer. So, let him come and marry his own mother. And not stopping there, let him bear children by her.

[*Enter OJUOLA.*]

OJUOLA. Aderopo is here, my lord.

FIRST CHIEF. My lord, I beg leave of you. *[Exit.]*

OJUOLA. Shall I bring him in?

ODEWALE. You go inside. *[OJUOLA hesitates.]* Go, go, go, woman.

[She goes into inner room. ADEROPPO knocks. ODEWALE does not answer. He knocks a third time, still no answer. ODEWALE is sitting on throne, gnawing at his fingernails in suppressed rancour. Door opens a crack. ADEROPPO pokes his head round, opens it further. Sees ODEWALE.]

ADEROPPO. My lord, may I come—

ODEWALE. If you think that you can drum for my downfall, and hope that drum will sound, then your head is not good.

ADEROPPO *[nonplussed]*. What was that, my lord?

ODEWALE. What is the matter, fellow, aren't you a Yoruba man? Must proverbs be explained to you after they are said? Aderopo, if you think like a tortoise you can plot against me without my cutting you down first with my own tortoise tricks, then, fellow, madness is in your liver.

ADEROPPO. Is that supposed to be a new form of greeting?

ODEWALE *[irked]*. Aha! I said if you think that you can uproot a tree that has been planted by the gods ... hmm ... my brother ... *[Gestures at his head to imply madness in the other's.]*

ADEROPPO. So be it, I shall greet you in like manner then ... *[Prostrating himself.]* Your highness, if you think to have heavy suspicions is wisdom, then your head is not well.

ODEWALE. Ehn! Ojuola! O-j-u-o-l-a! Come and listen to your son!

ADEROPPO. Why call my mother? You are a man, I am a man: let us talk man to man.

ODEWALE. Is that what you want?

[Enter OJUOLA.]

OJUOLA. My lord ...

ODEWALE. Go back.

OJUOLA. I thought you called ...

ODEWALE. I've changed my mind, woman; now leave us alone!

OJUOLA *[curtseying]*. Your highness. *[Exit.]*

ODEWALE *[shutting door after her]*. Very well, let us talk man to man.

ADEROPPO. What wrong have I done to you?

ODEWALE. First, answer me this: did you, Aderopo, or did you not press that I should send for that ... that blind bat who calls himself Seer?

ADEROPPO. What was wrong in—

ODEWALE. Answer 'yes' or 'no', young man. Yes, or no?

ADEROPPO. I did.

ODEWALE. Next question: did you love your father or did you not?

ADEROPPO. What type of question is that?

ODEWALE. Did you love your father or did you not?

ADEROPPO. There is no denying that I loved my father.

ODEWALE. Very well. Now then, when you heard that your father was killed by men you did not know, why did you not summon that blind bat then to tell you who had killed him, so that you could avenge the death of that father you said you loved so well? Answer that.

ADEROPPO. I did send for him.

ODEWALE. And what did he say?

ADEROPPO. He said that my father was killed by one man, not by a group of robbers as reported by the bodyguard who came back to us.

ODEWALE. I see; and did this Seer then mention Odewale

Ogundele as the killer of your father?

ADEROPO. He mentioned no name.

ODEWALE. Then why is it that all of a sudden the Seer trembles to hang me by the neck as the killer of your father?

ADEROPO. Why ask me? Am I the Seer?

ODEWALE. No, you are a tortoise, a coward, a conniving slippery maggot!

ADEROPO. What are those words supposed to mean?

ODEWALE. Just because I am an Ijekun man, and do not belong to your tribe, the sight of me as your King gnaws at your liver, and rips your heart asunder. So you go round me, bribe that blind bat to come and point his finger at me as the cursed killer of your father. Tell me now, is that not the act of crawling, cunning tortoise?

ADEROPO. Your highness, I have been taking all these insults from you because you married my mother and custom demands that I ...

ODEWALE. Ah, I thank you. Bedsharer. I forgot that one. The blind bat called me 'bedsharer' too. Tell me, what is the crime I have committed by marrying your mother and raising children by her?

ADEROPO. In time, you will know that you accuse me falsely.

ODEWALE. In time! You lie, friend. I will not give you time to hurt me. [*Strips himself bare, revealing a tight-fitting bante and a body covered with protective charms and amulets of assorted shapes and colours.*] Ojuola! [*To BODYGUARD.*] You call the Priest of Ogun. [*He draws a sword.*]

ADEROPO. What do you want to do now?

ODEWALE. Get you out of this land!

ADEROPO. For what offence?

ODEWALE. Two rams cannot drink from the same bucket at the same time! They will lock horns.

ADEROPO. Who is stopping you from being King?

ODEWALE. You ... trying to. Your intrigues, and blackmail and ... Oohh! take your time, child, if you rise too early the dew of life will soak you!

[*PRIEST and members of the King's household rush in from all directions.*]

OJUOLA. What is happening?

ADEROPO. The King has sworn to get me out of this land!

OJUOLA. Out of this land?

ODEWALE. Red-handed, wife, I caught him; people of our land, I caught him working evil against ... [*Thuds his chest and holds out the sword to ADEROPO.*] Swear! In the presence of all. Swear!

ADEROPO [*taking it*]. May Ogun crush me before the break of ...

PRIEST [*snatching sword*]. Don't swear!

ODEWALE. Why not?

PRIEST. My Master, Ogun, is a god with fierce anger, son; one does not call him to witness so freely. Sit down, son, let us sit down and settle the fight. Sit ...

ODEWALE. He must swear or he must leave my presence forever.

ADEROPO. Do as you wish! [*Turns his back to him.*]

ODEWALE. Listen to that rudeness!

OJUOLA. My lord, pray, cool your anger.

ODEWALE. Cool my—the boy cuts me and nobody chides him!

PRIEST [*going to ADEROPO*]. Son, you go away; when tempers calm down, we shall talk.

ODEWALE. You are all taking sides, are you? [*Seizes sword from PRIEST's hand.*] May my eyes not see Aderoipo again till I die! [*Bites, then drops sword and goes into his bedroom. Crowd begins to disperse in silence. OJUOLA hesitates, not knowing whether*]

to follow ODEWALE or ADEROPO. Finally she makes slowly, as one in a daze, for ODEWALE's bedroom.

PRIEST is alone. He crosses to Ogun shrine. A lonely flute plays softly in the background contrasting with incoherent phrases of drumbeats. Lights fade slowly.]

ACT TWO Scene 3

Same place. OJUOLA has just finished telling the story of Olurombi to the royal children.

OJUOLA. The song goes like this:

Onikuluku njeje ewure, ewure, ewure,
Onikuluku njeje agutan, agutan gbolojo,
Olurombi njeje omore, omore aponbi epo,
Olurombi o join-join, iroko join-join.

[To children.] Now, sing the chorus with me everyone.

[They sing.] Olurombi o join-join, iroko join-join etc.

[Bata drumming in back yard. Greetings of Kabiyesi.]

OJUOLA. Father has come ...

FOURTH CHILD *[running out]*. Father ...

OJUOLA *[stopping her]*. Listen, all of you. Come, come, come closer. Listen: Father is not happy today, and I want you to behave yourselves, do you understand?

SECOND CHILD. Why was Father fighting with Baba Aderopo?

OJUOLA. You never mind that; just don't make Father angry.

[Enter ROYAL BARD, accompanied by drummers, ushering in King ODEWALE. Drum stops abruptly.]

ROYAL BARD. There are kings, and there are kings

if you mean to hurt our king
you will fail:
the lion's liver is vain wish
for dogs.

[Drums.]

Ehn ... whoever thinks that he can
rule better than our king,
let him first go home and
rule his own wives
then he will know how hard to rule
is hard. Meat that has fat
will prove it by the
heat of fire!

[Drums. Enter ODEWALE; flanked by BODYGUARDS. OJUOLA kneels in greeting; children either kneel or prostrate themselves, according to their sex.]

An eagle does not go to the market-place
unless there is something there.
Odewale, King, Father of us all
went to the town today
to see his sick people.
Odewale, King, owner of strength,
you have had too much greeting from me;

[Pushes ODEWALE gently aside, and faces OJUOLA.]

Make way, I pray, let my greeting also
touch your wife.

[In appreciation, ODEWALE pastes some cowries on the forehead of the BARD and drummers.]

Ojuola,
Queen, daughter of Oyenike,

You and your husband—
 two parts of the same
 calabash split equal
 by the gods. Indeed,
 what is the difference between the right ear
 Of a horse
 And the left ear of that same
 horse?
 Nothing.

[Drums; final dance ending sharply.]

ACT TWO Scene 4

ODEWALE, now in casual wear, emerges from the bedroom
 and is met by OJUOLA in the sitting room.

OJUOLA. My lord, will you eat something now?

ODEWALE. I thought you were leaving with your son,
 Aderopo.

OJUOLA [kneeling]. It is you I married, your highness,
 not my son.

ODEWALE [moved]. Hm! Great woman. Indeed. Who says
 women have no heads? She is a foolish wife who
 sides with her son against her own husband. [Gestures
 her to sit on the stool next to the throne.]

A son is a son: a husband is a husband. A woman
 cannot love both equally. Everything has its own
 place. Why, the tortoise is not tall but it is taller
 than the snail; the snail is taller than the frog; the frog is
 taller than the lizard; the lizard is taller than the fly;
 the fly is taller than the ant; the ant in turn is taller
 than the ground on which it walks. Everything
 has its own place, its own level, its standing.

OJUOLA. I beg to—

ODEWALE. Do not kneel, I pray—

OJUOLA. I beg to ask my lord a question.

ODEWALE. A question? Ask many, ask anything.

OJUOLA. What is the quarrel between Aderopo and—

ODEWALE. No! [Rises.]

OJUOLA. But, my lord!

ODEWALE. I do not want to hear that one.

OJUOLA. But you said I could ask any question.

ODEWALE. There is a limit. Any question, true, but ...

but ... not about that ... that ... do not let me have
 to say his name again, I pray you.

OJUOLA. So I will know nothing about the grievance you
 hold against him?

ODEWALE [reconsidering]. Later. then, later. The blood is
 still hot ... later.

OJUOLA. This is a promise, my lord. There is no doubt in
 my mind that you will tell me everything on
 my second asking. [Kneels and begins to leave.]

ODEWALE. Tell Akilapa to come here.

OJUOLA. I will, my lord. [Curtseys. Exit.]

ODEWALE. Gods! What a woman! [Kneels before the
 household shrine, arms raised.] Give me some of her
 patience, I pray you. Some ... some of her cool heart
 ... let her cool spirit enter my body, and cool the
 hot, hot, hotness in my blood—the hot blood of a
 gorilla! [Cleansing himself in the sacred water.]
 Cool me, Ogun, cool me. The touch of palmoil is cool
 to the body. Cool me. The blood is hot. The blood
 is hot because fear now grips the heart of Odewale,
 son of Ogundele, a stranger in this land. Fear now
 grips my heart as I discover how King Adetusa, who
 ruled this land before me, was killed. Minds are not
 clean. If Adetusa, a son of Kutuje, could be killed in
 violence, and the murderer be hidden from vengeance
 in this same land, what will the people of Kutuje

not do to me of Ijekun tribe? Who can I trust? Ogun,
who can I—

[Bodyguard AKILAPA bursts in, spear in hand.
ODEWALE springs defensively to his feet, wide-eyed
with fright.]

ODEWALE. Who sent you to kill me!

AKILAPA [*panting*]. The Queen. She says your highness calls
me.

ODEWALE [*somewhat relieved*]. So, do you have to tear
in like that? Hunh? [*Seizes him by the neck.*]

Man, man, man . . . look at him! Everything: gira, gira,
gira . . . power, power, force, force . . . action, action!
No thoughts, no patience, no coolness of blood. Yet
you go about shouting that you are better than women,
superior to women . . . [*Shoves him aside.*] Get out,
braggart, go marry a woman and learn coolness of
mind from her.

AKILAPA [*astonished*]. Aha! But, my lord, I already have
seven wives!

ODEWALE [*sharply*]. Well, marry again, idiot!

AKILAPA [*resignedly*]. If it is your will, my lord. But what
does the King want me for?

ODEWALE. Go to the homes of all the chiefs in the land, tell
them to be quick and meet me here.

AKILAPA. I will, my lord. [*Hurries out.*]

[CURTAIN.]

ACT THREE Scene 1

*Commotion and scuffling off-stage becomes louder. Above
it a voice in desperation is heard.*

'I must see him. I must—let go of me! I say I will
see the King!'

*Two BODYGUARDS tumble in, and in their midst
ALAKA, a scrawny looking old man in weather-beaten
garb. BODYGUARDS swoop down on him to force him out
of the compound, but just then OJUOLA appears.*

OJUOLA. Stop that!

[BODYGUARDS leave man sprawled on the ground,
groaning.]

Are there not enough troubles in the land without
you starting your own?

FIRST BODYGUARD. This madman, your highness, he forced
his way in here.

SECOND BODYGUARD. He says he wants to see the King!

FIRST BODYGUARD. A madman wanting to see the King! The
world, indeed, is mad.

OJUOLA. How do you know he is a madman?

SECOND BODYGUARD. He is not a man of our tribe, your
highness.

OJUOLA. Therefore he is a madman? [*To ABERO.*]

Bring him something to drink. [*Crosses to ALAKA.*]

What do you want to see the King about, Old One?

ALAKA [*hotly*]. Let the King come out, and you will all
know me! Look . . . all of you . . . see . . . see these
marks . . . [*Cocks his head to one side, to display the
tribal marks on his cheek.*] Ijekun marks. See them . . . ?
I am an Ijekun man, just like your King. We grew up
together. In my presence he was born . . . I should say.

Before my very eyes. Ignorance makes the rat call the cat to a fight. Just you wait, you will all soon know me.

OJUOLA [*to a guard*]. Go tell the King that a man from Ijekun-Yemoja wants to see him. [*Hands a keg of palmwine and a calabash to ALAKA.*] The king will see you soon, Old One.

ALAKA [*sniffing the drink*]. Palmwine! [*Drinks then smacks his lips with relish.*] Aha! Now I know that I have reached the home of an Ijekun man! [*Drinks again, then raises a hand in prayer for OJUOLA.*]

Let Oya, the mother of children, grant you increase, good woman. [*Drinks.*] 'Scorpion' I used to call your King because of his temper. [*Drinks.*] Ogundele. Olowe Ogundele—the great antelope hunter, and humbler of the wild. That was the father of your King. I spent my childhood hunting and farming under Olowe Ogundele, father of your—

[*Enter ABERO.*]

ABERO. The King asks what is your name?

ALAKA. Go back to him, tell him the Farmer wants to see the Scorpion!

ABERO [*lost*]. The Farmer wants to see the Scorpion!

ALAKA. That is all. [*To OJUOLA.*] Good woman the calabash is empty. [*OJUOLA pours more drink.*]

For over three months now, I have been searching for him. See, see my clothes, all thick with dust and thorns. First, I went to Ede, where he told me he would be when he left our village, Ishokun, thirteen years ago. Just like that! We were both working on his father's farm one morning. He stood up:

'I'm going,' he said.

'Going where?' I asked.

'Leaving these parts,' he said, 'going ... going to

struggle for myself. Here ... swear,' he said to me, handing me his hoe, 'swear to Ogun that you will not tell anybody where I'm going, then I'll tell you where I'll be. Swear!' I swore, biting the weapon of Ogun. I'm going to Ede,' he said, 'and don't you come to look for me until my father and my mother are both dead!'

OJUOLA. Until his father and mother are both dead!

ALAKA [*nodding*]. Funny words. But ... too late, I had sworn.

[ODEWALE appears at the top of the steps. All the men prostrate themselves with the greeting Kabiyesi.

ALAKA remains standing, entranced, grinning broadly at ODEWALE.]

ALAKA. Scorpion! My child, Scorpion!

ODEWALE [*recognizing him*]. A-ah! Alaka, son of Odeḍiran!

ALAKA. Scorpion! One that must not be vexed.

Smooth on the surface

like a woman's jewel;

poison at the tail.

It is you I greet,

[*Prostrating himself.*]

son of my master the hunter

who squats playfully

to kill a lion.

[ODEWALE hurries down, arms outspread. They embrace.]

ODEWALE. My master! Alaka, son of Odeḍiran, son of Ijekun-Yemoja.

ALAKA. This is me!

[*They embrace again.*]

ODEWALE [*nostalgically sings a 'home' song while ALAKA dances*].

Èkun ku o

Mbo mbo
 M'ele wa ya
 Mbo mbo
 Èkun ku o
 Mbo mbo
 M'ele wa ya
 Mbo mbo
 Ere we tinkpojiba
 Kpòwòhan kpòròkan
 Nìloro ajanuwa
 Kpobere kako
 Hmm ... hmm ... hmm ...
 Alaka, son of Ọdẹdiran! Come enter my house.
 Enter ... my house is your house.

[*They enter, OJUOLA leading.*]

ALAKA. I have searched for you for many months. But that is no matter. Now I have found you, my heart is light.

ODEWALE. Alaka, son of Ijekun-Yemoja, you have come well to my house. Wife, this is my friend of all friends, my brother ... no, my master. He taught me everything in my father's house in Ijekun.

ALAKA. I did not teach you hot temper though!

ODEWALE. No, no, Sango, the thunder lion, taught me that one!

[*All laugh.*]

OJUOLA. I shall go and get warm water ready for his bath.

[*Exit.*]

ALAKA. Now, tell me where you have been all these years.

You deceived me, my brother, and I am angry.

ODEWALE. Deceived you?

ALAKA. Did you or did you not tell me that you were going to face the struggle of life alone, in Èdẹ?

ODEWALE. I left Èdẹ after ... it is a grave story, my brother.

ALAKA. What happened?

ODEWALE. You will be the first person I have ever told it to, Alaka, son of Ọdẹdiran. Can I still trust you?

ALAKA. Has time made my brother doubtful of me?

ODEWALE. Swear! [*Hands him matchet. ALAKA bites it.*]

I had a farm, a big farm, at that place where three footpaths meet.

ALAKA. At the place where three footpaths meet.

ODEWALE. Yes, near Èdẹ. A big yam farm. A farmer they called Kakalu, son of Atiki, who lived in Èdẹ sold it to me for five bags of cowries.

ALAKA. Is it still there?

ODEWALE. I ran away from it just as the yam harvest was coming.

ALAKA. Ran away from it! That does not make sense, my brother.

ODEWALE. I ... I ... a man died there. In my hands.

[*Flash-back: as lights fade in the bedroom ODEWALE's voice is carried over loudspeaker, as from a distance. Lights brighten on forestage, where men with hoes are grouting out imaginary mounds of yam. A short, slim man stands at a respectable distance supervising the labour. The climax of the fight scene should be mimed in slow motion, suggesting the nightmarish langour of bizarre recall.*]

ODEWALE'S VOICE. He provoked me. I went to my farm one morning. And what did I find? [*ODEWALE appears downstage, staring at the labourers in utter amazement.*] First this man ... short, an old man. In his company, all over the farm, people—all sorts of people, armed with hoes. On my own farm. And what were they doing? Digging up my sweat! These thieves were digging up my sweat. The blood rose hot. But ... 'I must be calm', I said to myself, 'calm and careful'. Just then, the old man turned round to throw

something away. His eyes and my own met. He came to me; I stood still, watching, waiting.

OLD MAN. What is it you want?

ODEWALE. Let me ask you that, Elder One.

OLD MAN. What did you say?

ODEWALE. The elders of my tribe have a proverb:
'because the farm-owner is slow to catch the thief, the thief calls the farm-owner thief!'

OLD MAN [*bursting with laughter*]. So ... I am the thief!

ODEWALE'S VOICE [*over loudspeaker*]. This man is indeed funny. Listen to him laugh. For a while, I too couldn't help laughing.

[*Both laughing together but ODEWALE with some restraint.*]

No ... no use fighting with him. Now I will talk to him, softly. And maybe I will take him to the home of Kakalu, son of Atiki, in Ede, the man who sold this land to me. This way, we shall understand one another without a fight.

OLD MAN [*stops laughing*]. You from the bush tribe, come to these parts and boldly call me 'THIEF'?

ODEWALE. Where am I from?

OLD MAN [*calling his men*]. Gbonka ... Olojo—come, come, come quickly—come and listen to this man's tongue.

[*Two men run over with their hoes.*]

ODEWALE'S VOICE. That is the end. I can bear insults to myself, brother, but to call my tribe bush, and then summon riff-raff to mock my mother tongue! I will die first.

OLD MAN. Say your proverb again.

ODEWALE [*furiously stripping off his upper garment*]. Get out of my land! All of you! Now!

OLOJO. Aha! Your land?

GBONKA. D'you want to fight?

OLD MAN. Why waste time? Bundle the thief up!

ODEWALE. Who's the land thief—me or you?

OLOJO. This land belongs to the mother of our master.

OLD MAN. I said bundle the goat up! [*Calls the remaining three men.*] Come here, all of you.

[*Men drop their hoes and attack ODEWALE. A fierce scuffle.*]

ODEWALE. Bundle me up? You'll have to kill me first!

[*Pulls out his tortoiseshell talisman pendant, holds it towards his assailants, and mesmerizes them.*]

What are these before my eyes?

What are these before my eyes?

Are they mountains or are they trees?

They are human beings and not trees.

They are human beings and not mountains.

For trees have no eyes;

and mountains have no eyes.

Then let these eyes around me close.

Close, close in sleep, close in sleep.

That is my word—the mountain always sleeps. Sleep ... sleep ... sleep ...

[*Assailants begin to sway drowsily.*]

Remain standing, remain rooted—
a tree stump never shifts.

Stand there ... stand back and sleep, sleep I say,
sleep till the sun goes to sleep

and you wake up to know my power.

Sleep ... sleep ... sleep ... s-l-e-e-p ...

[*The men by now are fast asleep, standing transfixed. But OLD MAN has pulled out his own charm of dried*

eagle's skull, vulture's claws, bright red parrot tail-feathers, etc. He holds the bizarre tuft in front of him and begins his conjuration.]

OLD MAN. No termite ever boasts of devouring rock!

I am your lord, your charms can do me nothing.

Venom of viper does nothing to the back of a tortoise.

The grinding stone says you must kneel to my power;

the basket says you must tremble when you see me;

mortar and pestle say you must bow countless times to power.

The day the partridge meets the lord of the farm

it jumps into the bush with its back

or it drops dead. Drop dead, drop dead ...

[ODEWALE staggers, his breathing becoming laboured]

The plant that rivals the opa tree in size is killed by Opa;

the tree that over-reaches the Oriri seeks its own death;

And the plant that entwines its branch

with the branch of

Ọmọluwere

will be strangled by

Ọmọluwere.

drop dead ... drop dead ... I say, drop dead ...

drop d-e-a-d ...

ODEWALE [*in a drawl, groping for something*].

When Ogun, the god of iron,

was returning from Ire

his loincloth was

a hoop of

fire.

Blood ... the deep red stain

of victim's blood

his cloak.

[*Finds what he is looking for—a hoe—and brandishes it high above his head.*]

This is ... Ogun

and Ogun says: flow!

flow ... let your blood flow

flow ... flow ... f-l-o-w ... [*Lurches forward and strikes*

OLD MAN down with a single blow of his hoe;

suddenly realizing the fatal result he backs away

overcome with fright.]

ODEWALE'S VOICE. The whole world ceased to be. Ogun ...

Ogun ... I have used your weapon, and I have killed

a man. Ogun ... ! With my own hands ... with my own

hands I have killed. Burst open ... burst open ...

Earth, burst open and hide me.

ODEWALE. Hide me ... h-i-d-e m-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e!

[*Runs off, with cry trailing in an echo. Lights slowly fade out on forestage.*

Full lights back on bedroom where we see ODEWALE again with ALAKA.]

ODEWALE. The woods heard my cry. The ground heard

my running. There was nothing to stay for on my

farm. I had wanted its soil to hold yams and my sweat.

Nothing more. Yams. And my sweat. Now there was

no yam in its soil. And in place of my sweat, there was

blood—another man's blood. In my search for

somewhere to hide, I crossed five rivers. It was that

search that brought me to this strange land. And as

for my becoming King of it, that part will have to await another telling. This is the story of my running, my brother.

ALAKA. It is a fearful story.

ODEWALE. The Old Man should not have mocked my tribe.

He called my tribe bush. That I cannot bear.

[Enter OJUOLA.]

OJUOLA [to ALAKA]. The water is ready, Old One.

ODEWALE. Go and have a bath.

[OJUOLA leads ALAKA out.]

ALAKA. Kind woman, you've taken good care of my brother.

I thank you.

ACT THREE Scene 2

The same place. King ODEWALE standing alone calling.

ODEWALE. Labata!

[Enter LABATA and OJUOLA.]

LABATA. Were you calling, my lord?

ODEWALE. Have the chiefs not come yet?

LABATA. No, my lord.

ODEWALE [angrily]. Go and tell them I am waiting.

[LABATA runs off.]

OJUOLA. Won't my lord eat even a little before he goes?

ODEWALE. No, no food yet. I must carry on my search for the murderer of King Adetusa. If we fail to catch the murderer in the town, we shall move on to the villages around us. If we find no murderer there either, we will go to the farms.

OJUOLA. May your search be fruitful, my lord.

ODEWALE. It must be. The people come tonight, at the end of the feast of Ogun, for answers to their suffering. I must

have something to show them, something to tell them.

I have sworn.

OJUOLA. When will my lord come back home?

ODEWALE. Come back home? When you see me, you see me, woman.

OJUOLA. Does that mean that my lord will not tell me why he is angry at Aderopo?

ODEWALE. Very well, I will tell you everything.

OJUOLA [sitting]. I am listening, my lord.

ODEWALE. Wife, I am an Ijekun man.

OJUOLA. You have now become one of our tribe, my lord.

ODEWALE [cynically]. Mmm . . . mmm . . . The monkey and gorilla may claim oneness but the monkey is Monkey and the gorilla, Gorilla.

OJUOLA. You have dwelled among us long enough, my lord, to be one of us.

ODEWALE. The mangrove tree dwells in the river, but does that make it a crocodile? That is the truth, wife, and your son, Aderopo, has been noising it in my ears.

OJUOLA. How, my lord?

ODEWALE. He is seeking my downfall because he wants to be king of his own tribe.

OJUOLA. Seeking your downfall!

ODEWALE. He is a son of this tribe of Kutuje. I am a stranger, a tramp in your midst.

[Enter FIRST CHIEF.]

FIRST CHIEF. My lord, we have all come.

ODEWALE. Pray, all be seated and wait awhile, I shall soon join you.

[Exit FIRST CHIEF.]

Your son has called me his father's murderer.

OJUOLA. His father's murderer?

ODEWALE. Which is to say: it is my presence among your people that brings so much illness and death.

OJUOLA. He said so himself?

ODEWALE. Oh, he is more clever than that, woman. He brought that blind soothsayer from Oyo.

OJUOLA. Baba Fakunle? Baba Fakunle called you 'murderer'?

ODEWALE. And 'bed-sharer'—ask the Chiefs.

OJUOLA. And my lord takes him seriously. The old man's mind is not sound. My lord should not take his words seriously. Why, was it not this same man—Baba Fakunle who ... [*Changes her mind.*] My lord must not take him seriously.

ODEWALE. Who what? What were you going to say? What are you trying to hide from me, woman? Or are you not to be trusted either?

OJUOLA. He made me ... kill my son.

ODEWALE. Kill your son! What son? What is this talk?

OJUOLA. My very first son—by my first husband. On the ninth day after the boy was born, my former husband summoned this Baba Fakunle to tell the boy's future.

ODEWALE. Well?

OJUOLA. Baba Fakunle said the boy had brought bad luck to the earth; and that we must kill the boy so that the bad luck would die with him.

ODEWALE. And you killed him?

OJUOLA [*nodding*]. In the bush. And when my husband died too, this same Baba Fakunle said he was killed by his own blood?

ODEWALE. He said that? That King Adetusa was killed by one of his own blood?

[*OJUOLA nods again, trying to control her emotion.*]

ODEWALE hurries off to summon the CHIEFS.]

Come in, all of you, come, come, come listen to something.

[*Enter CHIEFS.*]

Wife, you tell them what you have just told me.

OJUOLA [*to FIRST CHIEF*]. Were you not the one who sent for Baba Fakunle when my former husband was slain?

FIRST CHIEF. It is the custom of our land to find out how our kings die.

ODEWALE. Did you send for him or did you not?

FIRST CHIEF. Custom demanded; I obeyed.

OJUOLA. Were you not all present when Baba Fakunle said my first husband was killed by one of his own blood?

[*CHIEFS mumble vaguely.*]

ODEWALE. Answer, people.

CHIEFS. He said so. Indeed.

OJUOLA. So, why did you not tell him, that same soothsayer, that he lied, when he said again that it was this king who murdered the former king?

ODEWALE. I'm a stranger in your midst. Why would they tell him that he lied? That would make me innocent.

Can the cockroach be innocent in a gathering of fowls?

FIRST CHIEF. My lord we meant no evil against you.

ODEWALE. Of course, you all mean no evil against me. You all love me. We are all close friends. [*Sneering.*] Like he-goats and cocoyams!

SECOND CHIEF. We would ask the Queen to help us tell the King that, as the gods bear us witness, his tribe does no harm to us—

OJUOLA. But you give the King cause to suspect you all. For instance, you failed to tell the Seer that he was a liar. He has called this King murderer. But was it not this same soothsayer who some time ago said that my former husband was slain by one of his own blood? Which was a lie too. Not only was the former King not slain by one of his own blood, the bodyguard who came back after the murder told us that the King was rushed

upon and killed by ten robbers, men he had never seen before. Is that not the truth?

CHIEFS. It is the truth.

OJUOLA. By ten thieves near Èdẹ, at a place where three footpaths meet, and that—

ODEWALE. At where?

OJUOLA. That was what the man who came back with the King's body said, my lord.

ODEWALE. That the King was killed where?

OJUOLA. By ten thieves, near the town of Èdẹ.

SECOND CHIEF. At the place where three footpaths meet on the way to Oshogbo.

ODEWALE. At the place where three footpaths meet?

FIRST CHIEF. Yes, my lord.

THIRD CHIEF. On the way to Èdẹ.

ODEWALE [*impatiently*]. Why can't you people say one thing and stick to it? Why, is everybody mad? Once you said the king was killed near Èdẹ, next everyone talks of Oshogbo, then Èdẹ, then Oshogbo, Èdẹ, Oshogbo, Èdẹ, Oshogbo—what's the matter?

FIRST CHIEF. The King was killed on the road to Oshogbo, my lord, but the place was nearer to Èdẹ than to Oshogbo.

OJUOLA. At the place where three footpaths meet, one leading to Oshogbo, one leading to Iwo and Ibadan, and the third one going to Ile-Ife and—

ODEWALE. Enough! Will you give me time to think? What's the matter with you all, anyway?

OJUOLA [*kneeling*]. I beg of you, my lord, I did not mean to make you angry and—

ODEWALE. When was he killed?

OJUOLA. My former husband?

ODEWALE. Who else are we talking about?

OJUOLA [*tearfully*]. My lord is so angry I cannot even think—

FIRST CHIEF. It was the year before you came to us here.

SECOND CHIEF. Eleven moons had passed before you came to this land.

ODEWALE. Voices! There are too many voices now! You confuse people. I am asking only one person—the person who should know best.

FIRST CHIEF [*leading the CHIEFS away*]. My lord, we shall be waiting for you in the yard. [*Exeunt.*]

ODEWALE. Where is the man who came back to report his death?

OJUOLA. The bodyguard? The last I heard was that he now lives in Ilorin, far, far, away.

ODEWALE. I want him here!

OJUOLA. But, my lord, Ilorin is a far—

ODEWALE. Now! I must see him before I sleep! [*Calling.*] Agidi! Labata! Akilapa! [*To OJUOLA.*] They know the man well, don't they?

OJUOLA. They do, my lord.

[*Enter BODYGUARDS running.*]

ODEWALE. You leave for Ilorin now.

BODYGUARDS [*surprised*]. Ilorin!

ODEWALE. And you must come back before the moon stands straight in the sky.

BODYGUARDS. Ah!

ODEWALE. Ojuola will tell you what to do in Ilorin.

[*Retreating into bedroom.*]

OJUOLA. Who among you doesn't know Gbonka?

AGIDI. Gbonka, Gbonka?

LABATA. Gbonka who?

AKILAPA. There are countless Gbonkas all over the world, your highness.

AGIDI. Gbonka, Gbonka.

ODEWALE [*stopping at bedroom entrance*]. Bodyguard to the former King, you goats!

AGIDI, LABATA, AKILAPA [*in unison*]. Ah! Gbon-n-k-a-a-a!

AGIDI. Gbonka, the son of Elempe.

AKILAPA. A-ah, the man left Ilorin a long time ago.

ODEWALE. Where is he now?

LABATA. Dead.

AKILAPA. Liar! My brother, Degelu, saw him on his farm in Ipetu only last market day. [*Addressing AGIDI, seeking corroboration.*] Don't you know my brother, Degelu, the son of my mother's brother who married Motara the sister of your wife's mother, Niniola, who sells palmwine and pounded yam at the market near—

ODEWALE. You are wasting time! Where is Gbonka now?

AKILAPA. Ipetu, my lord. He has a farm, a cassava farm in—

ODEWALE. I want him here. Now!

AGIDI, LABATA, AKILAPA. Very well, your highness.

[*They rush out. ODEWALE goes into the bedroom.*]

ACT THREE Scene 3

ALAKA re-enters from bathroom, a calabash in his hand.

ALAKA. Forgive me, good sister, but to get off the dirt that so many roads had heaped on my body, I had to stay in the bathroom longer than a man should. Has the King been waiting for me?

OJUOLA. No, Old One. Food is ready now. [*Leads ALAKA to the dining area, on the opposite side from the bedroom.*]

ALAKA. Isn't the King eating?

OJUOLA. The King refuses to eat, my lord.

ALAKA. Is there something troubling his heart besides the illness in the land?

OJUOLA. A soothsayer came here and called him the killer of the former King.

ALAKA. Him . . . a killer! Is the man mad?

OJUOLA. That is what I told the King—not to take him seriously. I even told him about my own trouble when I had my first baby—a boy. This same soothsayer said that the boy had bad luck and that he would kill his father—

ALAKA. The boy would do what?

OJUOLA. And then marry me, his mother afterwards.

ALAKA. That your son would kill his own father, and then turn round and marry— [*Starts eating avidly.*] Pray woman, let me eat in peace . . .

[*Enter ODEWALE from bedroom.*]

OJUOLA [*to ALAKA*]. I beg you, Old One, talk to him, tell him not to feel troubled over the—

ODEWALE [*nervously loud*]. What type of clothes was King Adetusa wearing when he was killed?

OJUOLA. I . . . I cannot now remember, my lord.

[*ODEWALE, gravely disappointed, stops short, gazing absently ahead of him.*]

ALAKA. I hear you are not eating, my master. Never mind; pray, sit down, I have brought you good news.

[*ODEWALE does not respond.*]

OJUOLA. My lord, Baba Alaka is talking to you.

ODEWALE. What is it?

ALAKA. Sit down, my master.

ODEWALE. Why?

OJUOLA. Baba Alaka says he has brought you good news.

ODEWALE [*lifelessly*]. Well?

ALAKA. I am amazed, my master, I have been in here now a long time, and yet you have not asked about the health of your mother and father in our village.

ODEWALE. Well? ... Well, how are my mother and my father?

ALAKA. Is the scorpion angry at them?

ODEWALE. You never mind that. How are my mother and my father? I have asked now.

ALAKA. That is the good news I have brought to you: your mother is getting very old!

ODEWALE. I'm glad. And my father?

ALAKA. He has passed on to the land of the Silent Ones.

OJUOLA. *Awu!* And you call that good news?

ALAKA. Not me—it is the King. It is the news he has been waiting to hear. [*To ODEWALE.*] Isn't it? You made me swear to come and tell you as soon as Mother and Father fell in death, didn't you? Well, your father has fallen. Two years ago. But your mother refuses to follow him. And me, age is weighing on me. So I said to myself: 'Alaka, son of Odediran, instead of waiting for Mama to die, why not go and look for her son, Odewale. Go ... Get up go and look for her son.' So I came. [*To OJUOLA.*] Have I done wrong?

ODEWALE. How did he die?

ALAKA. How did he die? Why ... he died.

ODEWALE. By violence, or in peace?

ALAKA. What violence? The man became heavy with years and so he let the earth receive his body. [*Becoming loquaciously philosophical.*] We all will ... some day ... it is a promise—

ODEWALE. My father died in peace, then. [*Absorbs this, laughs, then turns to OJUOLA.*] Ojuola! Great woman! Ideal of all women! My backbone, my everything—knower of the truth! [*Embraces her.*]

Wise one ... you are right ... always in the right.

OJUOLA [*confused*]. What have I done, my lord?

ODEWALE. You said so—these soothsayers, oracles, gods—

they are not to be trusted. Not one! [*Sees FIRST CHIEF who has looked in.*] Come, come, come my elder brother, everybody—call everybody in. I have a story for you all— [*Calling.*] Bokini!

BOKINI. My lord.

ODEWALE. Bring stools here. My people, we have been walking on a wrong road. Our biggest trouble today is not the sickness in our land; it is the plague in our hearts. Our hearts and heads are sick with too much leaning on the Powers. Henceforth, my people, we struggle on—by ourselves, with our hands, our feet, our ... [*Touches his head.*] Alaka, son of Odediran get up! [*ALAKA obeys, confused.*] Now, tell them what you have just told me.

ALAKA. What I have just told you?

ODEWALE. Hurry. About my father—tell them, tell them everything.

ALAKA. The father of the King has gone to meet our Fathers before him.

CHIEFS. Ooh!

ODEWALE. No, no, I do not ask for pity. My people, bear witness: the gods have lied. Now listen to this: Alaka here and I were one day working on my father's farm when an old man whom I had long known as my father's brother walked up to us. I lay flat in greeting, as custom says. But what did this man do? He looked down at me, looked at me ... looked, then spat: 'the butterfly thinks himself a bird'. That was what he said: 'the butterfly thinks himself a bird'. Then he hissed, and walked away. Spat again.

OJUOLA. What did he mean by that?

ODEWALE. I don't know. I asked him. [*Indicating ALAKA.*]

ALAKA. The man had too much wine in his head.

[*The dialogue in the ensuing narrative is to be mechanized*]

—the words of the PRIEST being relayed over a loudspeaker to suggest the disembodied awesomeness of an oracle. ODEWALE, however, speaks his lines naturally.]

ODEWALE. True, but, my people, it is what is in the heart when there is no wine in the head, that comes out when there is wine in the head. A bush does not sway this way or that way, unless there is wind. I went to a priest of Ifa. I asked him: 'Am I not who I am?'

VOICE. 'You have a curse on you, son.'

ODEWALE. 'What kind of curse, Old One?'

VOICE. 'You cannot run away from it, the gods have willed that you will kill your father, and then marry your mother!'

ODEWALE. 'Me! Kill my own father, and marry my own mother?'

VOICE. 'It has been willed.'

ODEWALE. 'What must I do then not to carry out this will of the gods?'

VOICE. 'Nothing. To run away would be foolish. The snail may try, but it cannot cast off its shell. Just stay where you are. Stay where you are ... stay where you are ...'

ODEWALE. 'Continue to stay in the house of my father and mother? Oh, no, the toad likes water, but not when the water is boiling.' [To ALAKA.] That was why I fled from home, my brother. [To TOWNSPEOPLE.] Like a madman, I believed that the gods had willed me to kill the man and to marry the very woman who gave me life. But what has happened to my father now? He died without my even touching him. My people, the gods have lied! Or ... unless ... [Guilty pause.] Unless, it may be that my father died of a broken heart, thinking about me and where I was. If it is so, it comes back to the same thing: I killed him ... is it not? Speak, my people. Are the gods right?

OJUOLA. No, you did not kill him, he passed away in peace. Old man Alaka himself said so.

ALAKA. I don't know why you are getting so troubled, my brother. [Chuckles.] I didn't know that that was why you ran away from home, I would have tied you down.

ODEWALE [losing his temper]. You would have tied me down would you? Tied me down so you could laugh as you now are laughing qua-qua-qua! Laugh at me while I killed my own father and married my own mother. Is that your wish? If you think that is a laughing matter, may the gods curse you to—

ALAKA. They are not your father and mother, anyway.

ODEWALE [speaking at the same time]. Kill your own father and share a bed with your own—what did you say?

ALAKA. The hunter Ogundele and his wife Mobike—you think they gave you life? Anyway let's not bring that up now.

ODEWALE. What do you mean?

ALAKA. Never mind.

OJUOLA. They are not his mother and father?

ODEWALE. I am a butterfly then, calling myself a bird.

ALAKA [getting up to leave]. I pray you, my bowels are heavy, I must go ease—

ODEWALE [pulling him down roughly to his seat again]. What is this joke?

ALAKA [trying to sound casual]. I am glad to see that your youthful, hot temper is still with you, my brother. Scorpion!

One that must not be—

[ODEWALE hurls ALAKA to the floor, and pins him down. General commotion.]

ODEWALE. You ... must you shame me, too? You an Ijekun man like me. Stand back everybody! Tribesman, must you shame me too? You, whom I've known so

well, must you shame me in front of strangers?
 You . . . my own—stand back I say! You called me a
 bastard before the eyes of the whole world?

ALAKA. I did not call you bastard.

ODEWALE. Hunter Ogundele is not my father, his wife
 Mobike is not my mother. You said so. Well, who gave
 me life? [*Twists ALAKA's arm.*] T-a-l-k!

ALAKA. It is well, I will tell you . . . but . . . I beg you, let
 us go inside, you and I alone, in private. Secrets of the
 owl must not be known in daylight.

ODEWALE. No! You called me a bastard in the face of the
 whole world; prove before their eyes that I am indeed
 without father and mother, or give me back my pride!

ALAKA. I do not know who your mother or father is.

ODEWALE. Is that so? You will soon know! [*To a CHIEF.*]

Call in the armed guards! [*To ALAKA.*] You think you
 can shame me in public without punishment?

OJUOLA [*in tears*]. My lord, I beg of you—

ODEWALE. You keep off! Everybody keep off! [*Seeing
 CHIEF still around, yells at him.*] I said get me the
 armed guards!

FIRST CHIEF. But my lord, you sent them to Ipetu to get
 Gbonka.

ODEWALE. Then you see that this man does not run away
 [*ODEWALE rushes for his matchet, comes back wielding
 it.*]

ALAKA [*frightened*]. It is well, kill me!

This is the reward which you now as King must give
 to me for picking you up in the bush!

ODEWALE. Picking me up in the bush?

[*Enter BODYGUARDS, AGIDI, LABATA and AKILAPA.*]

AKILAPA. My lord, we've come back from Ipetu.

OJUOLA [*shoving them back roughly*]. Wait outside, I pray
 you—

ODEWALE [*matchet in hand, still looming over ALAKA*].

You picked me up in the bush?

ALAKA. That is the truth, your highness, may the god of
 iron strike me dead if I'm lying. [*Bites ODEWALE's
 matchet.*]

ODEWALE. What bush?

ALAKA. The bush in Ipetu village.

OGUN PRIEST. The bush in Ipetu! [*Exchanges glances with
 OJUOLA.*] My lord, that is enough!

ODEWALE. I must know who I am!

OGUN PRIEST. But my lord, the man has lost his head, why
 take his words seriously?

ODEWALE. You come close again, and you will see whose
 head will be lost. [*To ALAKA.*] Speak on, brother, what
 were you doing there?—In Ipetu bush.

ALAKA. Hunting. I was hunting with my master Ogundele.

ODEWALE. And you saw me in the bush?

ALAKA. A man brought you there, wrapped up in white
 cloth like a sacrifice to the gods. Your arms and feet
 were tied with strings of cowries—

OJUOLA. Ifa! What are you doing to m-e-e-e! [*Collapses.*]

OGUN PRIEST [*picking her up*]. Come . . . follow me . . .

ODEWALE. Nobody move! Stay, everybody: you, too, wife.

I may be of lowly birth but I'm proud to know about it.
 Brother, speak on.

ALAKA. With this knife, I cut off the strings of cowries,
 and relieved you of the pain.

OGUN PRIEST. This man is a liar from the womb.

ODEWALE. Stand back! Who was the man who brought
 me into the bush?

ALAKA. I can't now remember his name, but . . . short . . . a
 short man. He limps on the left leg. Ah, yes. I
 remember. He told us that his late wife came from
 Ikoti, the village near to our own in Ijekun-Yemoja.

ODEWALE. Of what tribe is the man himself?

ALAKA. He had Oyo marks on the face.

OGUN PRIEST. He is an Oyo man then?

ALAKA. No, no—he said he came from this very land of Kutuje.

OGUN PRIEST. Madman, see how you confuse yourself! First you said the man was an Oyo man, now you say he was born here—

ODEWALE. You put words in his mouth!

ALAKA. The man did not say he was born here; he said he was working here.

ODEWALE. What work?

ALAKA. A messenger.

ODEWALE. Who was his master?

[OGUN PRIEST sinks on to a stool in fright.]

ALAKA. I do not know.

ODEWALE [To PRIEST]. Do you know who that man was?

[Notices PRIEST slumped in seat, addresses CHIEFS.]

Does anyone know that man?

[CHIEFS turn their backs to him.]

Wife . . . do you know who that man was?

[OJUOLA rises to her full height, turns round, her face a mask, and without a word strides with measured ominous dignity, into the bedroom.]

People of Kutuje! Does anyone here know that messenger? A man who limps? Does anyone know who he was, or who he was working for?

[No answer. ODEWALE charges at OGUN PRIEST, matchet raised.]

OGUN PRIEST [thoroughly scared]. Gbonka, Gbonka!

ALAKA. Ahaa! That's correct. Gbonka! I remember now.

[CHIEFS hustle him aside.]

OGUN PRIEST [pulling ODEWALE away]. Have mercy, I pray you, ask no more, it is no use.

ODEWALE [dully]. I must know, my brothers, I must know who I am. Now, who was this man—Gbonka?

AKILAPA [looking in]. The Queen would not let us come in, my lord. We have come back long ago with the Gbonka you seek.

ODEWALE. I thank you . . . where is he?

AKILAPA. Outside, my lord . . . [Calling.] Agidi, Labata, bring Gbonka in now.

[CHIEFS rush forward blocking the entrance.]

ODEWALE. Make way, I pray you . . . make way . . .

ACT THREE Scene 4

GBONKA is led in. The moment he sees ODEWALE he stops short and looks away from him.

ODEWALE. Come this way! [GBONKA hesitates.]

I said come! Are you deaf?

[BODYGUARDS shove GBONKA forward, but he struggles back.]

AGIDI [pushing him forward more resolutely]. The king says 'Come closer!'

GBONKA [resisting]. It is well with me here—let the king talk, my ears can hear.

ODEWALE. You are Gbonka?

GBONKA. Yes, your highness, I am Gbonka.

ODEWALE. What was your job in this land?

GBONKA. I was a messenger to King Adetusa, the former King of this land, your highness.

ODEWALE. They say you were with King Adetusa when he was killed.

[*No answer.*]

LABATA [*yells*]. Answer!

ODEWALE. Don't shout.

AGIDI. He was the only one who came back after—

ODEWALE. It is him I'm talking to! [*To BODYGUARDS.*]
Bring him closer.

[*BODYGUARDS hustle GBONKA close to ODEWALE.*]

GBONKA [*scared*]. It is so, it is so, I was with King Adetusa
when he met hot death.

ODEWALE. Who slew him?

GBONKA. It was near Ede, at the place where three
footpaths meet!

ODEWALE. I did not ask you where—

FIRST CHIEF. He said who killed the former King?

ODEWALE. I want the truth!

GBONKA. A man, your highness.

CHIEFS. A man! Did you not tell us a band of robbers?

ODEWALE. Which do you want us to believe now? Answer
quick!

GBONKA. A man! May Sango's lightning strike me dead if
I'm lying!

ODEWALE. What kind of a man—what was he like?

GBONKA. It was a long time ago, my lord.

ODEWALE. Very well, then, let that pass. [*Points to ALAKA.*]
This man here—look at him well. Do you remember
him?

GBONKA [*after glaring at ALAKA*]. Did he say he was the
man who killed King Adetusa?

ODEWALE. Answer my question! Do you remember him?

GBONKA [*stares at ALAKA again*]. I do not, my lord.

ALAKA [*familiarly*]. Aha! Old One Gbonka!

GBONKA [*curious*]. Hunh?

ALAKA. You do not remember? Hmm . . . old age indeed does
cruel things to the mind! You do not remember—

GBONKA [*angrily*]. I said: I do not! Why trouble me? A-ah!

Why must I say I know you when I do not know you?

ALAKA. He-eh! Old man Gbonka—

GBONKA. Talk.

ALAKA. Old One, you do not remember one Ijekun boy
who hunted deer with his master in the bush of Ipetu?

GBONKA. Many people hunted deer in the bush of Ipetu.

ALAKA. Ijekun boy, I mean an Ijekun boy from the village
of Ishokun near Ikoti, the village of your wife.

ODEWALE. You waste time!

ALAKA. The man's brain is aged, my lord, and it needs to
be prodded little by little to bring forth remembrance.

ODEWALE. So, be quick about it!

ALAKA. Old One, remember, you even sent us a message
of greeting to the father of your wife who lived in
Ikoti in Ijekun-Yemoja, home of Atakumosa.

GBONKA [*nodding remembrance*]. Ehenn! How is your
master the great hunter?

ALAKA. My master the great hunter has passed on to the
land of our silent Fathers.

GBONKA. Ooh, may peace rest on his spirit. So this is you?
—Come, my son, come to my arms!

[*They embrace. ODEWALE steps in and tears them
violently apart.*]

ODEWALE. This man said you handed him a baby boy in
the bush of Ipetu.

GBONKA. Hunh?

ALAKA. Old One, have you forgotten? You gave my master
a baby boy when we met at Ipetu bush.

GBONKA. If it was so, it was so.

ALAKA [*proudly indicating ODEWALE*]. Look! That now
is him! The very baby you brought into the bush
tied up in cowry-strings and . . .

[*GBONKA lays about ALAKA and starts buffetting him*

left and right. CHIEFS converge to separate them, but GBONKA manages to wriggle through them, and starts hobbling quickly away.]

ODEWALE. Stop him!

[BODYGUARDS pounce on GBONKA and push him back to ODEWALE.]

GBONKA *[to ALAKA]*. Madman, may the god of thunder blow up your big mouth before— *[Charges at ALAKA again, but ODEWALE intervenes.]*

ODEWALE *[matchet raised]*. Old One, you provoke me with your delays!

GBONKA *[subdued]*. Pray, have mercy, I meant you no wrong, I only tried to spare your life, my lord, I meant no harm. They ordered me to kill you in the bush, but I took pity and gave—

ODEWALE. Who ordered you to kill me?

GBONKA. The man behind you, my lord, the Priest of Ogun.

OGUN PRIEST *[gravely]*. It is the custom: when the gods command, we men must obey!

ODEWALE. Whose child was I?

OGUN PRIEST. It is too late now, you must know the last, even if—

ODEWALE *[in a frantic scream]*. I said who gave me b-i-r-t-h!

OGUN PRIEST. She. The woman who has just gone into the bedroom. Bearer of your four children. She too is your ... mother!

[Freeze: moment of absorption. ODEWALE drops his matchet, then dazedly goes from one CHIEF to the next arms held out as if ready to embrace. But he goes past each, avoiding being held or steadied. The round completed, he picks up the matchet and shuffles dreamily into the bedroom. Simultaneously, there is a loud

wail in the bedroom. ABERO stumbles out distractedly, crying.]

OGUN PRIEST *[to a BODYGUARD]*. Hurry ... get Aderopo.

[BODYGUARD runs out.]

ODEWALE *pulls the bedroom curtain slowly open, and reveals the body of QUEEN OJUOLA lying motionless on the bed. He bends over her—a dreamy, slow movement—and pulls from her body a dagger.*

Absently he draws the curtain close against a surging, curious crowd of CHIEFS and BODYGUARDS.]

ODEWALE. Leave us alone, I pray you.

[CHIEFS and BODYGUARDS withdraw into the sitting room of the palace in stunned silence.]

OGUN PRIEST *[to ABERO]*. Don't just lie there crying—go ... take care of their children—hurry up.

[ABERO leaves, still sobbing, just as ADEROPPO storms in.]

ADEROPPO. Where is my mother?

CHIEFS *[pulling him back]*. Patience, young man— He wants nobody in there—

FIRST CHIEF *[emerging from the bedroom with a blood-stained dagger]*. Oh ... Ogun ... it is all over.

OGUN PRIEST. Is he dead too?

FIRST CHIEF. Gods! I have seen deaths before. As a warrior in this land of Kutuje, I have seen deaths, at home, in battle. I have seen deaths. But the death of a woman with a knife pushed deep by her own hands to reach her very womb ... Gods!

[ADEROPPO wrenches his arms free from the CHIEFS' grip, rushes into the bedroom, flings the curtain wildly open to be confronted by KING ODEWALE, groping about in the bedroom, his eyes gouged out and oozing blood.]

ADEROPO staggers back in horror from the bedroom.]

FIRST CHIEF. He reached down ... calmly ... so calmly ...
pulled out the knife from her body and then ...
again calmly ... [*Demonstrates gouging of eyes.*]

OGUN PRIEST. Plucked out his own eyes?

[*CHIEFS and PRIEST make for bedroom, but collide with ADEROPO.*]

ADEROPO. Why didn't anybody stop him!

FIRST CHIEF. I tried, son ... the gods bear me witness ... I
... rushed to him, wrestled to seize the knife from
his grip but ... his strength was the strength of a
hundred vexed lions. And I was alone.

[*CHILDREN prance on to stage playfully approaching ADEROPO.*]

CHILDREN. Baba, baba, baba!

We have waited for you all these days.

What happened to our mother and—

[*ODEWALE is groping his way into the sitting room. News has spread and the TOWNSPEOPLE are converging on to the palace.*]

ADEROPO shields the children from the gory sight of KING ODEWALE.]

ADEROPO. Abero ... Abero ... come take them away—

ODEWALE. Did I hear the voice of my brother, Aderopo?

[*ABERO leads children away.*]

ADEROPO [*prostrating himself*]. Your ... highness.

ODEWALE. My brother, I have done you much wrong with
my grave suspicions.

ADEROPO. It is nothing, your highness ... It is the way the
gods meant it to happen.

ODEWALE. No, no! Do not blame the Gods. Let no one
blame the powers. My people, learn from my fall. The
powers would have failed if I did not let them use
me. They knew my weakness: the weakness of a man
easily moved to the defence of his tribe against others. I
once slew a man on my farm in Ede. I could have
spared him. But he spat on my tribe. He spat
on the tribe I thought was my own tribe. The man
laughed, and laughing, he called me a 'man from
the bush tribe of Ijekun'. And I lost my reason.
Now I find out that that very man was my ... own
father, the King who ruled this land before me. It was
my run from the blood I spilled to calm the hurt
of my tribe, that brought me to this land to do more
horrors. Pray, my people—Baba Ogunsomo—

[*Exit ADEROPO into bedroom.*]

OGUN PRIEST. My lord—

ODEWALE. Balogun.

FIRST CHIEF. I stand with you, my lord.

ODEWALE. Otun.

SECOND CHIEF. My lord.

ODEWALE. Osi.

THIRD CHIEF. I am here, my lord.

ODEWALE. Pray, give her ... my wife—my mother ... pray
give her a burial of honour.

PRIEST AND CHIEFS. No more shall life make a mockery
of her womanhood.

ODEWALE. I thank you. [*Calls.*] Adewale.

[*CHILDREN run in.*]

ADEWALE. This is me, my father.

ODEWALE [*touching a child*]. 'Dewale—

ADEBISI. No, it is me, Adebisi.

ODEWALE. Oh, where is Adewale?

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ADEWALE. Here I am, father.

ODEWALE. Take 'Yemi by the hand.

[OYEYEMI hands him her left hand.]

ADEWALE. No, not your left hand! [*Hits OYEYEMI's hand.*]

OYEYEMI. Leave me alone!

ODEWALE. Ssshhh! Do not fight, do not fight. [*He links the children's hands.*] Where is Adeyinka?

ABERO. Here she is my lord.

[*He reaches out and takes the baby.*]

ODEWALE. Adewale, you lead the way.

ADEBISI. To where, father?

ADEWALE. To where?

ODEWALE. Anywhere . . . wherever we get tired, there we rest to continue again.

[*CHIEFS rush to stop him.*]

Let no one stop us and let no one come with us or
I shall curse him . . .

When

The wood-insect

Gathers sticks,

On its own head it

Carries

Them.

[*They start on their journey, passing through a mass of Kutuje townspeople who kneel or crouch in final deference to the man whose tragedy is also their tragedy. Soft choral dirge.*]

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